

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

receive the sweet body of the Son of God spiritually from you." 1 And not only her enemies, but even her confessor seemed against her. Sometimes Fra Tommaso himself bade her, under the duty of obedience, to mistrust her visions, to regulate her life more like those of others in order to avoid scandal, to force herself to eat. Humbly and patiently, she always obeyed him to the letter, and found the agony caused her by the attempt to eat and drink a new way of doing penance. " Let us go and execute this wretched sinner," she would say with a smile when the time came, and, though she simply masticated what little she took without swallowing any, the pain was so intolerable that, in after years, Fra Raimondo urged her not to continue the attempt, in spite of what was said. Nevertheless, she persevered in this until her last illness, though the torment it caused her grew almost daily more terrible and acute.

Friends and disciples, of both sexes, now began to gather round her. Her little cell in her father's house became a centre of religious life, an ever-burning spiritual lamp to all in Siena who looked for righteousness.

A little group of ManteUate became her constant companions. Chief among them were the two we still see supporting her in Bazzi's glorious fresco: Alessa Saracini and Cecca (Francesca) Gori; both widows of noble birth, who had given all their possessions to the poor, and taken the black and white habit of penance. The latter, an older woman, had three sons in the Dominican order, probably very young novices. Of the former, Fra Raimondo writes that, although she became her disciple later in time than some of the others, she was nevertheless, in his opinion, the first in perfection and Catherine's most faithful imitator. Both appear to have been educated women, and to have frequently written Catherine's letters for her. Closely associated with these was the Saint's beloved sister-in-law, Lisa, " my sister-in-law, according to the flesh, but my sister in Christ," the wife of her brother Bartolommeo—all the members of Jacomo di Benincasa's family then living under his roof. Her own sister